Audio Research | CD5 | £4678

A fine balancing act from the CD5

Audio Research is hi-fi royalty. It was one of the first brands to be associated with the term 'high-end', and has consistently produced top-class equipment throughout its 40-odd years of audio existence. The company's products have a very distinctive look that hasn't really changed. Park the highly regarded SP10 preamp from the early '80s next to the new CD5 and there would be little in terms of appearance to suggest the CD player is newer.

For most Audio Research buyers, this is a good thing - it's traditional, and separates the brand from competitors. The CD5's build quality is rugged and suggests this player is in it for the (very) long run. It all feels reassuringly solid and sturdy, from the sliding disc lid to the casework (though it must be said the haphazard arrangement of the top-plate screws leaves a lot to be desired - what was the thinking there?)

Now we've got those complaints off our chest, from this point on it's all good news. As expected, the CD5 is a careful evolution of the CD3 SE. The transport, a Philips PRO2M, is mounted on a rigid beam, which itself is attached to a large metal plate. The whole assembly is damped, meaning that the transport is protected from external vibrations and so should be able to do its job of reading the digital data from the disc a whole lot better.

The CD5's circuits are all relatively new and, combined with beefier power supplies, the result is better resolution and dynamics. And it's on sonic ability that the CD5 justifies its mighty price tag.

Forget the outdated style - this is one of the best-sounding CD players out there

TECH SPECS

Type Integrated **Analogue outputs** RCA phono, XLR **Digital outputs** Coaxial **Headphone** No **Memory** Yes **CD text** No **Finishes** Black, silver **Size (hwd)** 13 x 48 x 31cm **Weight** 12kg

Detailed and dynamic

This is a wonderfully fluid-sounding player that delivers changes of pace and dynamics with ease. Listen to *Harvey Two-Face* from *The Dark Knight* OST and the results tug at the heart, while delivering refinement and depth, but never at the expense of the drama. The balancing act it performs without breaking a sweat is awe-inspiring.

This is simply a brilliant all-rounder - give it a similarly talented system and it'll wow you over and over again.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR A brilliant combination of subtlety, dynamics and refinement

AGAINST Mess of screws on the top panel; cheap-feeling control buttons

VERDICT Audio Research strikes gold again. The CD5 is a terrific player for the money